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THE MODERN MEANING OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE

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It is unfair to say that the Monroe Doctrine was a mere *pronunciamento* based on provincialism and selfishness, and that it has never served any useful purpose.

True, one of its earlier basic ideas was the natural separation between the old and the new world—an idea of two separate spheres which was unwarranted however much it may have seemed desirable to Jefferson in the Napoleonic period of “eternal war” in Europe. This idea of isolation was never a vital principle of the doctrine. The United States was a world power from the beginning and early felt the need of naval bases in the Mediterranean. As a world power it has rights in Europe, Africa and Asia.

True, the Doctrine was largely due to self interest, together with the feeling that the United States was logically the political leader among the American powers. Secretary Adams in his instructions to Rush, on November 29, 1823, said: “American affairs, whether of the northern or southern continent, can henceforth not be excluded from the interference of the United States. All questions of policy relating to them have a bearing so direct upon the rights and interests of the United States that they can not be left to the disposal of European powers animated and directed exclusively by European principles and interests.”

The United States, beginning with the transfer of Louisiana from Spain to France in 1801 and the apprehended transfer of Florida from Spain to some other European power in 1811, has steadily opposed any European acquisition of American territory which as a European colony might prove dangerous to American peace and security.

The Monroe Doctrine, based upon this principle, has been preëminently a doctrine of peace—especially secured by freeing the Americans from the contests of European diplomacy and politics. In 1905, President Roosevelt said the doctrine as gradually developed and applied to meet changing needs and conditions, and as accepted by other nations, was one of the most effective instruments for peace in the western hemisphere.

Although its policy was based on self interest, the American government under Monroe gave proper consideration to the interests of Latin America. Although in recognizing the independence of Spanish American countries, it had issued a declaration of neutrality, Secretary Adams later (October, 1823) informed the Russian minister that this declaration "had been made under the observance of like neutrality by all the European powers" and might be changed by change of circumstances. The Monroe Doctrine which followed was directly caused by the belief in the right of free peoples to determine their destinies—and by it the United States, with unusual courage, became a protector of liberty and self government in the western hemisphere. Its high purpose and convenient usefulness was properly recognized at the time by the weak Latin-American republics. It was the outgrowth of the sympathy felt for Latin American peoples who were struggling to free themselves from conditions imposed by European politics and who had been recognized as independent nations by the United States. Monroe, who previously as secretary of state was familiar with Latin American conditions, at first contemplated a bold stand to prevent European interference in Spain itself. After the decision to limit the scope of active opposition to the threatened European intervention in American affairs, he appointed a special secret representative to visit Europe, to watch the operations of European congresses and to furnish reports as a basis of determination of American policy. Luckily he was successful in blocking intervention without resort to more active measures.

The Doctrine has prevented the partition of Latin America,

and without any request of remuneration for the service rendered. Its unselfish purpose and unusual daring, in face of what seemed a serious peril, gave it a well deserved popularity both in the United States and in Latin America countries—many of which have in many instances since endeavored to secure treaty stipulations based upon its principles, or have invited the United States actively to intervene to protect them from the apprehended intervention of European powers or from despots who might prepare the way for European intervention.

In spite of apparent lapses of consistency, illustrated in the case of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty (which was supported as a measure which was expected to free an important part of the continent from European intervention), the basic principles of the Doctrine, interpreted with proper elasticity to meet changing conditions, were asserted with success in other later cases. The most notable cases were the termination of French intervention in Mexico in 1867, and the settlement of the Venezuelan boundary dispute with England in 1895-96—after the famous Cleveland-Olney interpretation which resulted in a triumph of the American demand for arbitration, awakened the entire world to the modern meaning of the “menaces of Monroe,” and caused someone to regard the Doctrine as an international impertinence. Although originally a mere declaration of Monroe, nobody since the action of the United States in the Venezuelan affair can surely say it has never had the sanction of Congress.

The Doctrine, although based primarily upon the right of Latin American states to govern themselves, has been sometimes erroneously regarded as a doctrine of American expansion. It is not based on territorial conquest—although over half a century ago it was sometimes associated with that idea. It expresses a duty and a sympathy toward Latin America and not a desire for territory. Americans, who logically in their early history established their boundaries on the gulf, for a half century have not been inclined to encroach upon the territories of their neighbors.

It is true that much Latin American suspicion of Ameri-

can territorial designs was justified in the decade before the American civil war, when under the influence of American leaders of the southern states, the shibboleth of "Manifest Destiny" was added to the doctrine of national security. In January, 1855, Marcoleta of the Nicaragua legation protested against the projects of the self-styled "Central American Land and Mining company" to encourage immigration to Central America, and especially against the nature of the "schemes devised against Central America by these modern Phoenicians who assume military titles . . . and grasp the sword and musket instead of the ploughshare and ax and shepherd's crook, thinking to make conquest of the golden fleece which they believe to be hung and secreted amidst the briars, forests, thickets and swamps . . . under the by no means attractive and seductive influence of a pestiferous and fever-giving atmosphere." Suspicion was doubtless increased in 1856 by plans for an American protectorate over the Isthmus of Panama, formulated in a treaty (between the United States and New Granada) whose ratification was prevented by a change of administration in the United States and a revolution in New Granada. These suspicions were prominent in producing the project of a Latin-American Confederacy of 1856—a proposed alliance which was regarded as antagonistic to the United States, and which caused Dana, the American minister to Bolivia, to propose to the Buchanan administration early in 1857 a clear statement of American foreign policy based upon the Monroe Doctrine, non-expansion in Latin America, and treaties of alliance with the Latin American states, in order to sustain self government in both Americas. In 1858, in connection with the policy of the American government to secure a neutral transit route across Central America, Nicaragua issued a manifesto against apprehended filibustering expeditions from the United States, and by demanding a European protectorate indicated a line of policy which Secretary Cass promptly warned her that the United States had long opposed and would resist by all means in her power, for reasons "founded on the political circum-

stances of the American continent which has interests of its own."

It is true that, after the Gadsden purchase, persistent efforts were made under the administrations of Pierce and Buchanan, not only to extend American influence and domain in the West Indies, but also to solve the Mexican problem by additional reduction of Mexican territory—or by the establishment of an American protectorate which was expected to result in new acquisitions to the stronger country. These efforts, largely based on the danger of European influence and apprehended European intervention in Mexico, closed with the beginning of the American civil war and with the arrival of the long-predicted European intervention in Mexico.

Under Seward, the American government sought only to preserve Mexico from the Confederates and from permanent European occupation, and the American senate refused to enter into any arrangement by which a proposed mortgage on lands of Mexico might have resulted in new annexations. Later, although Mexico feared American expansion toward the southwest and hesitated to coöperate in the construction of railroads across the international boundary, the United States government remained true to the assurances of Seward in Mexico after the expulsion of Maximilian. It sought no acquisition of territory in Mexico; and much less did it desire territory in Latin America farther south, except in connection with the later projects for the construction of the interoceanic canal whose benefits would be shared by Latin America and the entire world.

The part taken by the United States in Cuba and in the Venezuelan controversy with the European allies has revealed to Latin America the true feeling of the government of the United States. It has shown them that the mother republic is sincerely and earnestly interested in the success of republican government throughout this hemisphere. It has shown that the purpose of the older republic in relations with Latin America is not one of conquest, but one of sympathy, coöperation, and assistance. The true policy of the American government since the civil war was

recently expressed by Secretary Root, and more recently by President Wilson in his Mobile speech.

The idea of an American interoceanic-isthmian canal, which possibly was considered as a minor factor in producing the original declaration of Monroe, was later a prominent factor in causing the United States government to assert a status of "paramount interest," which is now emphasized as a cardinal point of American foreign policy growing from the basic principle of the policy of Monroe and Adams. Seward steadily acting under the doctrine of the larger influence and interests of the United States in American affairs, in 1864 began to assert it in a series of negotiations and treaties with Central America and Columbia in regard to the proposed isthmian canal. His successor, under Grant's administration, hopefully expecting the future "voluntary departure of European government from this continent and the adjacent islands," in 1870-77 favored the acquisition of San Domingo, as a measure of national protection to prevent the apprehended danger of its control as a possession or a protectorate of a European power, and to secure a "just claim to a controlling influence" over the future commercial traffic across the isthmus. Later, he endeavored to negotiate with Columbia a treaty by which he sought for the United States a greater privileged status and more extensive rights of intervention on the isthmus—a treaty which Columbia refused to ratify. In 1880, Secretary Evarts asserted the doctrine of American "paramount interest" in projects of interoceanic canal communication across the isthmus, and the right to be a principal party to any political arrangements affecting this American question. This doctrine received new meaning in 1881 after the occupation of Egypt by Great Britain which already owned a controlling majority of the stock of the Suez Canal, and again after the events of the American intervention in Cuba which brought new opportunities, new duties and new responsibilities to the United States. The construction of the canal under American control was the logical conclusion of a long series of events; and the wisdom of the diplomacy and policy which seized opportunity by the

forelock, and terminated the long period of discussion and delay, can safely be submitted to the test of time.

Although changed conditions in both hemispheres, and of motive power on the ocean, have modified the earlier meaning of the Monroe Doctrine, and may still further modify it, its main basic principle for America has not been abandoned. This principle is not obsolete. It has been retained on the broad ground of national welfare, in spite of the defects in Latin American governments so frequently resulting in troubles due to unpaid claims; and European powers have recently shown a readiness to accept it at the Hague Conference and in connection with the Venezuelan debt question of 1902. The latter incident, according to leaders in England, gave the Monroe Doctrine an immensely increased authority. Mr. Balfour, approving the American policy, suggested that the United States should more actively enter into an arrangement by which constantly-occurring difficulties between European powers and certain states in Latin America could be avoided.

Unless we have reached the conclusion that all Latin America might be better under European control, and that this control would not seriously threaten the peace and permanent interests of the United States, at least one important principle of the Doctrine should still be retained as a fundamental part of American foreign policy. Under whatever name, and however modified to suit the conditions and needs of American foreign policy, it is still a useful principle. It may fitly be called the doctrine of national defense, which in its results may be regarded also as a doctrine of Pan-American defense. In America the United States government has duties and responsibilities which can not be abandoned to the mercy of trans-oceanic powers, nor submitted to the decision of international conferences or tribunals. It must attend to the larger interests of the United States—without any unnecessary interference with the larger interests of other powers. Certainly, in Mexico at present, the United States has a larger interest than that of any European power. She has a far greater interest than any other power in the restoration of peace and the

establishment of a government that has proper basis or permanency in its method of selection and in its policies for adjustment of problems that press for solution. Peace in America, on the basis of good government, is more important to the United States than it is to Europe, and more important to the United States than peace in Europe.

The present basis of policy is the paramount interest of the United States in American affairs—a special interest which, especially in the Caribbean, can be shared with no other power, and perhaps would be questioned by no European power. After the war for the relief of the Cuban situation in 1898—a war which made the United States an Asiatic power and brought it in contact with European politics in the far East—American paramount interests in the West Indies, and in the Caribbean, were greatly increased and especially found expression in the messages of President Roosevelt and in various acts of the American government—including the construction of the Panama Canal which has clearly increased the importance of maintaining around the Caribbean the American policy against the interference of European powers. In this region the United States has duties and responsibilities which it may not willingly share with any European power.

Father south, the assertion and maintenance of the doctrine of non-intervention has been rendered less necessary by the growth of several more perfect, orderly and stable governments, which themselves are the best guarantors of the Doctrine. The larger Latin American republics, in which governments have reached sure bases of permanence, may properly be invited by the United States to coöperate or participate in the consideration of mutual larger interests in America, and to share the responsibilities incident to the American principle of defense of American nationalities. Doubtless by such a continental extension of the means of safeguarding the Monroe Doctrine, Latin American neighbors through the sobering effect of actual responsibility would cease to misinterpret the motives of the mother republic in the Caribbean and on the Isthmus.

Whether we admit Olney's declaration that "the United

States is practically sovereign on this continent," it seems clear that as a result of its geographic situation it has a "paramount interest" in the western hemisphere which imposes certain rules of policy toward Latin American neighbors—especially toward those in the Caribbean and around its shores. This doctrine was at the basis of the Cuban intervention, of the construction of the Panama canal under American control, of the declaration of policy to Germany in connection with the blockade of Venezuelan ports, of the policy in Santo Domingo, of the recent policy in Nicaragua, and of the present Mexican policy. The essential idea is to prevent the danger of European intervention which might result in the acquisition of territory.

A possible result of this policy is the intervention of the United States to set in order the conditions which invite foreign intervention. Such a policy, however undesirable, may be necessary unless the United States is ready to abandon its past policy in regard to European intervention. Actual intervention of force of arms is a possible necessity which the American government, judging for itself the action which the situation may require, would undertake only after much forbearance and as a last resort to secure peace between warring factions, and to prevent dangers more serious. Such intervention was contemplated in Mexico in 1867, but was fortunately avoided by the French withdrawal which precipitated the fall of Maximilian.

In case a European power seeks redress for an injury which can be fairly settled only by occupation of soil, the American government might logically be forced to accept the rôle of international policemen and assume responsibility of satisfying the injured party. Against Venezuela in 1902, the United States permitted a military debt collecting demonstration with the assurance that no territory would be occupied. She determined the reasonableness of the demand upon the delinquent government, and also the method of collection. In the case of Santo Domingo, she prevented the necessity of European intervention by assuming administrative control of the Dominican finances for the purpose of paying foreign credi-

tors, and with no view to territorial aggression. These two cases indicate the purpose of the American government at Washington to prevent the use of the non-intervention principle of the traditional American policy as a shield to protect delinquent Latin American republics from the payment of debts, as it was used in the case of the proposed joint European expedition against Mexico in 1859.

The United States has never had a wish to interfere in the internal policies of Latin American neighbors. She has had no desire to interfere with those which are orderly, and no inclination to interfere with those which are disorderly. But in the case of Mexico she has refused recognition to de-facto governments irregularly or unfairly elected. The election of Maximilian by a reported "immense majority" was regarded as a farce.

The maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine places upon the United States a responsibility to prevent its foreign policy from becoming a shield to protect the existence of revolution, anarchy and military despotism which increases the debts of neighboring Latin American countries and results in vast foreign claims for property destroyed. The protégés of American foreign policy should more carefully seek to maintain orderly and well administered governments which will not invite foreign wrath. In Central America, the disorder might be reduced by federation; but the problem is beset by many difficulties.

The supreme need of these republics is to establish a basis by which changes of policies and parties can be made peacefully through the ballot box. The continued disorderly condition of affairs must either result in the abrogation of the Monroe Doctrine so far as it protects them, or in the alternative of a more active American policy to secure more peaceful internal conditions. It is possible that arbitration in some form may be applied to civil commotions in such a way as to afford a general remedy if elections are free and fairly conducted. Possibly, some plan for the establishment of a receivership for delinquent states could be devised by a conference of American states. Such a plan might prove of great value in securing peace—and

might in some instances provide for taking charge of the government pending a presidential election. In some instances the plan might result or terminate in confederations which would reduce the dangers of future disorder and prepare the way for peace and prosperity. Under the receiverships, ballot reforms and regulation of election systems could be inaugurated. The United States as a near neighbor stands in a favorable position to take the initiative in the consummation of such reforms.

With the development of orderly governments around the Caribbean—governments which can maintain for themselves the same principle of the Monroe Doctrine which has served as their protection—the United States will gladly be relieved from the often embarrassing responsibility by which she has sought to preserve constitutional government and peace on this hemisphere—especially in the part of it where she has the largest share of responsibility for the maintenance of order.